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Ket Shamanism

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This article surveys what is known about traditional shamanism among the Ket people living in the Yenisei River area of central Siberia. It provides an overview of practices, beliefs, paraphernalia, and linguistic aspects of Ket shamanism. The article also outlines how Ket shamanism came to the attention of the outside world. It also describes the current state of shamanism among the Ket living in Turukhansk District, citing information gathered on the authors expedition to the Yenisei and Yelogui rivers in August–September 2008.

Introduction

The Ket family groups who nomadized across broad areas near the Yenisei River and its tributaries in Russia's Turukhansk District were the last hunter-gatherers of Inner Eurasia.

Traditional ethnographic accounts categorize them as "Paleosiberians" or "Paleoasiatics," together with North Pacific Rim sea-mammal hunters and fishers such as the Yukagir, Yupik, Itelmen, Nivkh, and Ainu, as (Shrenk 1883: 256–257), although Ket origins and language appear to be completely distinct from these peoples. The usefulness of the terms "Paleosiberians" or "Paleoasiatics" as a generic economic descriptor for all North Asian non-pastoral hunting groups is diminished by the inclusion of the reindeer-breeding Chukchi and Korak in this designation. Unlike the reindeer-herders who surround them on all sides, the Ket traditionally had only one domesticate, the dog, an animal used in hunting and for pulling small loads. A few southern Ket groups briefly acquired reindeer from their Selkup neighbors during the 20th century. Only during the Soviet collectivization campaign of the 1930s were the Ket first settled in Russian-style villages, after which many

families still continued to spend much of the year as before, moving between winter and summer hunting grounds rather than living in one place. Evidence from river names suggests the Ket and their now-extinct southern relatives (the Yugh, Kott, Arin, Assan and Pumpokol) lived in the forests between the Upper Yenisei and the southern tip of Lake Baikal before being pushed gradually northward by the intrusion of pastoral peoples (Vajda 2001, in press). Though distinct from the reindeer-breeding tribes of western and southern Siberia both linguistically and anthropologically, the Ket maintained centuries of contact with neighboring Samoyedic and Turkic tribes, often intermarrying with them. Consequently, all central Siberian peoples, including the Ket, share many parallels in their spiritual culture and traditional healing practices. Though Ket shamanism reveals a number of unique aspects, the features held in common with other West Siberian forest peoples such as the Selkup, Khanty, and South Siberian Turks (Khakas, Altai, Shor), places it squarely within the cultural heritage of spiritual traditions from aboriginal central Siberia.

How Ket Shamanism Came To Be Known to the Outside World

The Ket today live in one of the most isolated parts of modern Siberia. Because the Turukhansk District has seen no extensive development based on the exploitation of underground reserves of oil, natural gas or minerals, there are no sizeable urban areas or even roads or railroad links in this area, which is larger than the territory of California. The 1200 or so people recorded in the 1989 census as belonging to the Ket ethnicity live mainly in small villages near the Yenisei or its tributaries and remain largely invisible to the world outside of the Russian Federation (for up-to-date demographic information see Krivonogov 1998; 2003). The mobile Ket hunting bands were even less accessible to outsiders before being forced to settle in multi-ethnic riverside villages during the 1930s. Originally referred to as the Yenisei Ostyak, they were studied first-hand ethnographically only in 1905–1908, when the Imperial Academy of Sciences sent V. I. Anuchin to record detailed information about their material and spiritual culture (fig. 1). The objects gathered by Anuchin form the basis of the Peter the Great

Fig. 1. Photo of Ket people. Anuchin Expedition, 1906.

Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography's collection of Ket artifacts. In terms of published scholarship, the expedition's result was a monograph on Ket shamanism (Anuchin 1914) that offers a wealth of data, much of it not recorded again by subsequent fieldworkers. The Finnish linguist Kai Donner visited the Ket in 1912 during his three-year sojourn (1911–1913) in central Siberia. Donner (1933) contains material of interest for the study of shamanism, some of it collected from Ilia F. Dibikov, a young Ket man who visited the author in Finland for three months in 1926. Earlier writings on the Ket penned by explorers from the 18th and 19th centuries deal primarily with linguistic facts, though some include brief anthropological observations.[1]

The next researcher of Ket ethnography came from Germany. After the establishment of the USSR, the new Soviet government invited Berlin Museum worker Hans Findeisen to spend 13 months in 1927–1928 among the Ket in the area of the Mountain Tunguska River. Findeisen's primary interest was shamanism, and he collected a vast amount of primary material, including songs, photographs (figs. 3 and 4), artifacts, and folkloric texts. Much of Findeisen's material remains unpublished and some of it perished in Allied bombing raids during

[1] Cf. the general discussion in Vajda 2001: 1–17, 92–94.

the Second World War.[2] Findeisen's pioneering and invaluable work on Ket shamanism is unfortunately still largely unknown, aside from what he included in his general monograph on shamanism (Findeisen 1953).

During the inter-war years, two talented Soviet scholars of the Ket met with a tragic end, and most of their material never gained wide attention (Vajda 2001: 6, 154–155, 162). Niko K. Karger, inventor of the first Ket alphabet, performed ethnographic and linguistic fieldwork among the Ket during an expedition to the Yenisei in 1928, bringing back valuable artifacts to enhance the Ket collections of the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography established by Anuchin. Unfortunately, Karger fell victim to the political purges of the 1930s. His alphabet was discarded and only a few of his writings ever saw the light of day; none of those that were published deals specifically with shamanism. The ethnographer Grigoriĭ M. Korsakov, also working during the 1930s, perished in the early 1940s during the Leningrad Blockade and his archive has never been recovered.

The next major advance in the study of Ket shamanism came in the 1960s, as Evgeniia A. Alekseenko began what was to become three decades of dedicated fieldwork among the Ket on behalf of the same Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography that houses the earlier collections by Anuchin and Karger. Some of her most important findings derived from fieldwork conducted during expeditions in the summers of 1970–1972, undertaken primarily to collect new data on Ket shamanism. The essential readings on Ket shamanism are Alekseenko (1967; 1978; 1979; 1981a; 1981b; 1984a; 1984b; 1992; 1997), though this list far from exhausts that author's published works. Vajda (2001: 20–41) includes an annotated bibliography of all of Alekseenko's numerous publications on Ket ethnography between 1959 and 1998.

Invaluable information on the five traditional categories of Ket shamans appears in English in Alekseenko (1978). Each category was distinguished by differences in their dress and paraphernalia, as well as by distinctive spirit helpers and differing abilities to travel to the sky or to other realms during shamanic trances (see below). It is important to note that because shamanism throughout the North was actively suppressed by the Soviet authorities beginning in early 1930s, only Anuchin, Donner and Findeisen were able to observe traditional

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[2] Janina Findeisen, personal communication.

Ket spiritual life in open practice, and even this picture was probably nothing more than a remnant of the culture as it had existed before the social dislocations brought on by the importation of European diseases and the imposition of *yasak* (fur tax) beginning in the 17th century. Nevertheless, the salvage ethnographic studies conducted by Alekseenko beginning in the late 1950s illuminated many previously unknown facets of Ket shamanism.

Other studies conducted during the second half of the 20th century also include mention of previously undocumented elements pertaining to Ket shamanism, notably Kreinovich's (1969) description of the traditional economic life-cycle of the Ket nomadizing in the vicinity of the Mountain Tunguska River. Nikolaev (1985: 90–109) traces the ethnic origins of different aspects of Ket culture, some apparently connected with the forest, others with steppe pastoral peoples farther to the south. Ivanov and Toporov (1969) compare Ket mythological elements with other Native Siberian traditions. Werner (2006: 51–63) analyzes shamanism along with other aspects of traditional Ket culture using comparisons of Ket vocabulary with that recorded from the extinct southern Yeniseian languages. Werner's work is invaluable for its compilation of shamanic lexicon—special words used by shamans during their songs and séances. The annotated bibliography in Vajda (2001) provides descriptive commentary on all publications dealing with Ket shamanism through 1998.[3]

Beliefs Regarding the Soul and Human Health

Anuchin (1914: 11) reported that the Ket possessed "amazingly few healing resources" as well as an unexpectedly sparse knowledge of plant lore, given the fact that they were forest hunter-gatherers. Plant lore is also weakly represented in the Ket language, and even the best speakers of Ket today have but a limited repertoire of names for individual herbaceous plants. Because healing practices among the Ket were documented only in the 20th century, however, it is possible that some earlier traditions simply disappeared without being recorded. One reason for the lack of medical practice is that the Ket attributed all illnesses not to physical

[3] Cf. in particular the indexed listing (Vajda 2001: 384–385).

problems with the human body itself but rather to the condition of its *ulvei* (or *ulbei*, depending on dialectal pronunciation)—the immortal life essence thought to be associated with every human. The Ket believed every person possessed an *ulvei*, a word that literally means 'water-wind' and often translated as 'soul' (Russian *dusha*) in descriptions of Ket spiritual culture. According to Ket traditional belief, every person was animated by seven spirits, the number seven figuring prominently throughout Ket folklore and belief. Among these seven, the *ulvei* was absolutely essential to the person's well being. The rest were acquired from eating various plants and animals and little is known about their individual characteristics. Unlike the other spirits, which could inhabit plants and animals as well as humans, the *ulvei* could only animate a human being or a bear, the latter being regarded as a lost human relative. According to Pavel Sutlin,[4] the *ulvei* possessed the form of a small person. A similarly anthropomorphic image of the *ulvei* appears in Anuchin (1914: 10), who relates how the evil witch Hosedam imprisoned the *ulvei* of the great shaman Doh by nailing its hands and feet to a tree, after which Doh lost his shadow and was unable to remain on the earth, thereafter dwelling instead in the second layer of the sky. Illness typically occurred when an *ulvei* wandered too far from its owner. Chills were perceived as a sign that the *ulvei* had become lost in a cold place, while fever resulted if the *ulvei* became overheated. Serious illness such as paralysis or coma indicated that the *ulvei* had lost its way completely or had been captured by Hosedam, the evil witch of the north who devoured lost human souls. Long-term absence of the *ulvei* eventually caused the death of its human host.

When a person died, his *ulvei* could pass into the sky or descend to the underworld, later returning to inhabit another individual. One of the shaman's duties at funerals was to divine whether the *ulvei* had gone to the sky or to the underworld. An *ulvei* outside a human body experienced neither torment nor ecstasy, but simply waited in a sort of limbo for the next incarnation, which occurs when it entered the body of an unborn baby near the time of birth by passing through the sex organs (Anuchin 1914: 10). The shaman was able to locate a missing *ulvei* and return it to its owner, thus curing severe illness. This quest was one of the main purposes of the shaman's singing and dancing. The shaman was also able to discover why

[4] Personal communication.

an *ulvei* was ill or out of sorts, in which case the person it inhabited would show the same symptoms. Hosedam, evil goddess of the north, hunted and devoured *ulvei* that wandered too far, causing the illness and death of their owners. It was the primary task of the shaman to retrieve stolen souls and lead them back, thus curing the patient. Hosedam and her legion of servants were the shaman's principle adversaries.

Two categories of people in Ket society were traditionally involved in healing the sick. These were the shaman (known as *sening*) and the sorcerer (*bangos*, or *bangoket*, a term meaning 'earth person'). The *sening* operated exclusively through magical intervention involving contact with the spirit world and did not resort to the use of natural medicines, while the *bangos* treated the sick with the help of talismans containing various plants and minerals. Certain categories of shamans were connected with the upper, heavenly world and were helped by the myriad spirits (*esdeng*) who dwelled in the seven layers of the sky. The *bangos* by contrast, was confined to the earthly realm and also had knowledge of the underworld. Such people were said to be able to see no higher than the flight of a bat, but could peer far down into the earth (Anuchin 1914: 19). The bat, mole, and snake were animals associated with *bangos* activity. The *sening* was able to ascend up to the sky or fly far across the earth in order to commune with the spirit world, and each *sening* had his unique path, which was kept secret from that of other shamans. According to Anuchin (1914: 25), there were no "black" or evil shamans among the Ket, whereas a *bangos* could cast both good and bad spells on people. The *bangos* was thought to be able either to cure or induce rheumatism in people, for example. Both *sening* and *bangos* claimed to be able to foretell the future and predicts good fortune for hunters. This suggests that *sening* and *bangos* were social roles, rather than invariably distinct personages or entirely unrelated spiritual traditions. Anuchin (1914: 32) reports that of 14 shamans operating among the Ket during his 1906–1908 expedition, a number of them functioned as *bangos*, as well. The latter role was most effective on moonless nights, whereas *sening* began their séances in the evening, preferably when both sun and moon were simultaneously visible in the sky. In general, the *sening* and *bangos* magic was kept in separate spheres, and even *bangos* talismans were disallowed during shamanic séances (Anuchin 1914: 19). Unfortunately, no detailed study of the *bangos* was ever conducted and it is possible that this social role represents the survival of a more ancient healing tradition.

To recapture lost or stolen *ulvei* and return them to their owners, the shaman resorted to a trance-like state that assisted his flight into other realms. During my stay on the Yelogui River in August, 2009, one elderly woman told me that shamans used to eat the fly agaric mushroom, *Amanita muscaria*, which is called *hango* in Ket, in order to achieve the proper state. It was the shaman's task, assisted by his spirit helpers, to fight Hosedam or any other malevolent beings that stood in the way of accomplishing this feat. According to Ket lore, the great shamans of the past were able to induce Hosedam to regurgitate the souls she had swallowed, after which they could be reunited with their owner. If the owner had already died, the *ulvei* would become free to be born into a new human baby. The great Ket culture hero Alba, a figure with folkloric parallels among the South Siberian Turks (Ivanov and Toporov 1969; Nikolaev 1985), was said to have freed many souls by inducing vomiting and diarrhea in Hosedam. But generally only shamans had the capacity to traverse the dangerous northwest trail into the realm of the northern witch to battle her for control of the *ulvei*. The shaman's ability to undergo the shamanic trance and travel to the spirit world was thus considered crucial to the health of the group.

Chronic maladies were thought to be caused by a rock getting into the sick person. The shaman was able to remove the rock with the help of the spirit of the gray crane (*tau*), which could extract the object with its long beak. The loon (*bit*) was also regarded as a shamanic bird due to its ability to dive from the air into the water to get food. Shamans employed their loon spirits to find and regain wayward *ulvei* from the underworld realm.

On Becoming a Shaman in Traditional Ket Society

Among the Ket, both men and women could become shamans. Anuchin (1914: 23) claims that the shamanic gift was passed on to a member of the opposite sex in the next generation so that it alternated between males and females in the same family line. Alekseenko, however, noted that while the shaman's gift was inherited within the confines of a single family group, the preponderance of shamans were men, as were all great shamans, so that a strict gender-based intergenerational skewing does not appear to have been a universal norm, at least not in the 20th century.

Women shamans were unable to travel to the sky and were limited to the earthly realm in their shamanic quests (Alekseenko 1978; 1981b).

Shamans were distinguished from ordinary people through family inheritance of the shaman's gift, or *qut*. The *qut* is conceptualized as an anthropomorphic spirit passed down from one generation to the next. The *qut* also brought special "sky people" (*esdeng*), shamanic helper spirits whose power likewise passed from one shaman to a relative in the next generation (Alekseenko 1981b: 99). The *qut* was immortal, with each bearer merely representing a single link in the chain of its earthly manifestation. It could not be shared by two shamans in the same family simultaneously, but passed on only after the death of the older shaman. The shaman's song is also known as *qut*, and the same root appears in verb forms expressing shamanic dancing and singing: *duqut* "he shamanizes," *dilqut* "he shamanized." Finally, this root also forms the basis of the word *quttyn* (or *qutn*), used as a synonym for *sening* 'shaman'. The latter word appears to be a more ancient in that it is found in some of the extinct southern Yeniseian languages as well as in Ket.

The shaman's gift was sometimes manifested at a young age, when a child proved to be high-strung and unsociable. More often the gift appeared in young adulthood, when the individual would fall into a sort of mental illness called *dariy*. This word is translated as 'shaman's illness' but it is also used generically in Modern Ket to refer to any sort of mental imbalance. According to Anuchin (1914: 24), the *qut* might appear to a twenty-year old and summon him to begin shamanizing. Other spirits would follow, causing the inchoate shaman to become unsociable, to laugh or cry without obvious cause, and to feel the urge to sing or dance. According to Anuchin's informants, a person beset with *dariy* who resisted the shamanic call might become permanently insane or even die, but one who heeded it spent the next few months or years learning to master the spirits that visited him. It was considered that every shaman had a choice of seven spiritual trails, one of which, however, was fatal to him. Finding one's proper trail, the secret path to be taken during shamanic trances, was essential for the beginning shaman, as was composing the proper song (*qut*). Generally, a person called by the spirits to become a shaman would succeed in finding his proper trail and in composing his unique song. He would master the spirits that had induced *dariy* and would regain his mental health. As a sign to the community that this had occurred, the beginning shaman would request that a beater stick (*hatbul*) be fashioned for him. A man or woman who received this first *hatbul*, which was typi-

cally made out of semi-rotten wood to symbolize its temporary character, was called a 'minor shaman' (*hyna sening*). There was no other custom of shamanic initiation among the Ket, no public ceremony. Minor shamans had no drum and merely sat by the fire singing their spirit song while keeping tempo by hitting the beater stick against the left shin to summon the spirits (Anuchin 1914: 26).

According to Anuchin (1914: 24–25), the shaman grew increasingly powerful with practice. Shamans destined to possess the greatest power would go through seven stages of three-year cycles to finally become a "great shaman" (*qa sening*), capable of traveling to the upper levels of the sky. With each successive stage, the shaman acquired more spirit helpers. Great shamans were uncommon, and always were old men (Anuchin 1914: 25). Such a powerful spirit gift was greatly prized by the families that possessed it. Alekseenko (1981b) explains how the majority of shamans did not follow this complex path of maturation but remained what she called "family shamans," that is, minor shamans (*hena sening*) who shamanized only occasionally and, as a rule, only within their own family group. A minor shaman who later refused to acquire a drum progressed no further in the development of his shamanic powers. Such shamans appear much closer in function to the *bangos*, since they likewise healed minor ailments and foretold the future or divined answers to questions by tossing a bear paw up into the air, the palm landing skyward denoting an affirmative answer to whatever yes-or-no question had been posed to the spirits. Minor shamans often lacked both drum and special clothing. Great shamans equipped with the full accoutrement of shamanic regalia were much less common. When a shaman died, his basic regalia were placed by his grave to decay—a sign that the spirits were ready to pass to the shaman's descendant. But a great shaman's iron pendants and perhaps his crown and the top of his staff were handed down within the family group rather than exposed to the elements. As important family heirlooms they were kept in a special box called a *qossul*. The contents and form of one *qossul*, translated as 'shaman's sled', is described in detail in Alekseenko (1981a), an article containing illustrations of the various iron spirit images that once belonged to a great shaman.

Anuchin (1914: 33) described the clothing and paraphernalia associated with the stages of becoming a full-fledged "big" shaman. The individual elements were received in a specific order, as the shaman became increasingly more powerful through the acquisition of more

and more spirit helpers. The first item was the temporary beater stick (*hatbul*), followed by a headband (*tuneng*). This was followed by the acquisition of a breast pendant (*qutn*), then boots and gloves (*senda tesing* and *senda boon*). A crucial stage in becoming a stronger shaman was receiving a drum (*has*) and a new beater stick (*hatbul*). This was followed by a shaman's staff (*tagoks*), then by a coat and crown (*senda qat* and *senda dy'*), the latter two received simultaneously. As shamans acquired more spirit helpers they also received an increasing number of iron pendants symbolizing these spirits. Pendants were placed on the shaman's coat during shamanic séances. Shamans destined to become great shamans would eventually receive a second drum. The round drum shape is shared between the Ket and most other peoples of south-central Siberia, notably the Altai Turks and the Samoyedic Selkup. According to Findeisen,[5] the drum of the Ket shaman is larger than that of other Siberian tribes (fig. 2).

Fig. 2. Shaman drum (Hans Findeisen, 1926–1927).
Photo courtesy of Janina Findeisen.

[5] Janina Findeisen, personal communication.

The fieldwork performed by Alekseenko in the early 1970s added an important new dimension to our understanding of the Ket shaman by elucidating the presence of five distinct categories of shamans, distinguished by different primary animal helpers and consequently by different types of clothing and other regalia (Alekseenko 1978). The shaman costume described so elaborately in Anuchin (1914) is, in fact, typical for only one of these five categories. This happened to be the most widespread type of shaman, called the *qaduks* shaman, whose main spirit helper is a flying female reindeer, known as *qaduks*, a word not found outside of shamanic parlance. This category of shaman traveled to the sky world by using the drum as a female reindeer to ascend into the sky. The membrane of the drum, consequently, was made of reindeer skin. A *qaduks* great shaman typically had reindeer horns made of iron as part of his headgear (see figs. 3 and 4).

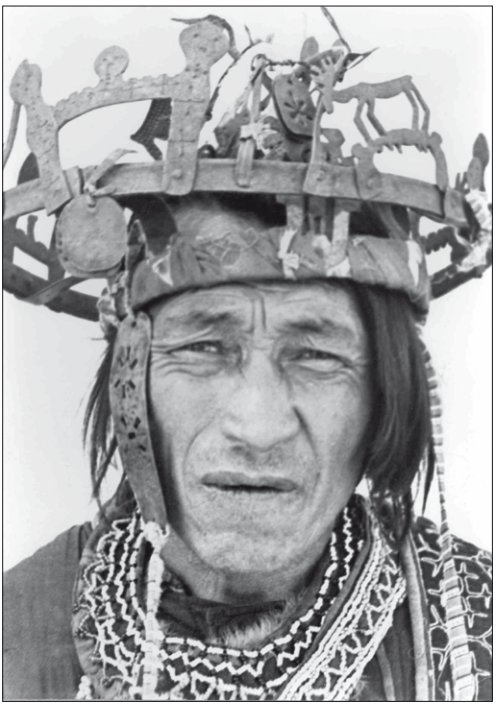

Fig. 3. Reindeer shaman's iron crown, Kellog Village 1976.
Photo courtesy of Heinrich Werner.

Fig. 4. Reindeer shaman's crown and clothing, Kellog Village 1976.
Photo courtesy of Heinrich Werner.

In contrast to the *qaduks* shaman, the bear shaman generally did not ascend into the sky but rather took paths across the earth, especially leading to the forbidding northwest, where Hosedam was thought to imprison the souls she had stolen from unfortunate people. The bear shaman had no drum and used a bear paw instead of a drumstick. While shamanizing he sometimes fastened the dried nose and mouth portions of a bear over his face, using a rawhide strap. His clothing was made of bearskin and contained iron images of the bones of bears. There was also a category of shaman whose patron spirit was an anthropomorphic figure called *kandelok*, which sported bear paws instead of hands. The *kandelok* shaman also had an iron headdress described by Alekseenko (1978: 261) as resembling a sort of helmet. Bear shamans and *kandelok* shamans possessed not only bear spirit helpers, but also were assisted by the *allel* family guardian spirits and by the *dangols*, or spirits of dead ancestors.

Another category of shaman was associated with a mythical giant eagle known as *dagh*, said to be large enough to cover the sun. Iron images of eagle claws often adorned his coat. This type of shaman especially prized eagle feathers. Like the *qaduks* shaman, the eagle shaman could ascend to the sky and receive assistance from spirits there. Interestingly, the eagle was said to have first taught humans how to shamanize. In one version, the first shaman had originally been an eagle; in another version a two-headed eagle taught humans to shamanize and was punished by losing one of his heads, in a sort of Siberian analog to the Prometheus myth. Two-headed eagles images are often found among the shaman's iron pendants. The first great shaman Doh seems to have been an eagle shaman, given the fact that an eagle often perched on his shoulder. Among the Ket it was taboo to kill eagles, and eagle feathers found by chance on the ground were displayed in special places of honor in the tent.

The last category of shaman was the dragonfly (*dynd*) shaman, whose coat tapered to a point in the back, symbolizing the insect's shape. A photograph in Alekseenko (1967: 191) illustrates the dragonfly shaman's headdress, which sported iron plates formed in the shape of thunderclouds. This type of shaman was thought to be the most powerful, and could ascend to the highest levels of the sky accessible to humans. His patrons were the dragonfly and the swan, as well as Tomam, benevolent goddess of the south revered for sending the migrating birds northward every summer. The swan (*tigh*), a sacred

bird that could not be hunted, was a special spirit helper to the dragonfly shaman. Dragonfly shamans could only operate in warm months, however, when the dragonfly, swan, and other migratory birds sent by Tomam were present. Dragonfly shamans seem to have been the least common type of shaman, while minor shamans most often belonged to the *qaduks* category. These did not acquire a drum or headdress and practiced with a drumstick, but instead wore regular clothing and the special headband known as *tuneng* (Alekseenko 1981b: 104).

The seven trails accessible to shamans were apportioned differently according to the category to which the shaman belonged (Alekseenko 1978: 261). The *qaduks*, bear, eagle and *kandelok* shamans all were capable to traveling from southwest to northwest, into the frozen realm of Hosedam. The dragonfly shaman could travel only to the southwest, along two different trails. All shamans except the bear could travel eastward toward the sunrise. Bear shamans were confined to the earth, while the other categories could also fly up to the sky during their quests, though the *kandelok* shamans, like the bear shaman, usually operated in the earthly realm.

The Fate of Ket Shamanism

The Ket are broadly similar to other early hunter-gatherers across the globe, where certain members of the tribe are regarded as being endowed with special powers to heal the sick through spiritual intervention, normally accomplished through magical singing. The root of the word *sening* 'shaman', appears related to words meaning 'sing shamanically' in the languages of the North American Athabaskans, Eyak, and Tlingit (Vajda 2010). If correct, this linguistic comparison reveals the deep antiquity of shamanic practice in the Northern Hemisphere. At the same time, many features of Ket shamanism reveal close parallels with the peoples of the Altai-Sayan Mountains of south-central Siberia notably the Shor, Khakas and Altai Turks. The round shape of the Ket shaman's tamborine is very similar to that of Altai–Sayan peoples, and the name of this instrument (*has*) is possibly shared with languages of steppe pastoralists. The Buriat Mongol word for 'shaman's drum' (*xese*) and the Teleut and Tubalar Turkic word for 'hoop' (*kash*) may represent the same word as Ket *has* 'shaman's drum'. Alekseenko (1984b: 81) suggests these words originated from the expansion

of steppe nomads in the Hunnic Era, before the rise of the First Türk Kaghanate in 552 A.D. Alongside the word *sening*, the Ket shaman is also known as *quttyng*, a term apparently derived from *qut*, a loanword into Ket meaning 'shaman's gift' or 'shaman's song' that in Turkic seems to have originally meant 'spirit'. The whole complex of belief in the sacred sky world and the ascent of the shaman skyward to find spirit helpers there appears borrowed from interaction with Turkic steppe peoples. The word *qaduks* 'flying female reindeer', a figure associated most obviously to the ability of shamans to ascend to the sky, likewise appears to lack any Native Ket etymology. The vertical axis of sacred sky and profane underworld duplicates the probably more ancient Ket horizontal dichotomy whereby the upriver south appears as sacred in contrast to the downriver north, the location of Hosedam and the area where souls are lost or devoured (Vajda, in press). A later Turkic origin for more elaborate social forms of shamanism also coincides with the arrival of iron from the steppe peoples and its association with details of the shaman's costume. The original Ket shaman, the *sening*, was probably closer in function to the *bangos* sorcerer, with lore of the earth being central to the most ancient traditions of spiritual healing.

The mixed forest and steppe shamanic heritage of the Ket tribes encountered by the Russian state in the early 17th century was left mostly unchanged despite interference from the Russian Orthodox Church. Only in the 19th century did Christian proselytizers begin to make inroads into the traditional world of Ket spiritual belief (Alekseenko 1979). Even here, however, reported baptisms yielded at most a conversion in name only, as the Ket generally maintained their beliefs in shamanism and other pre-Russian traditions. Medical knowledge from the Russians was slow to penetrate the north, due to the extreme isolation of the forests through which most Ket nomadized, so that before the mid 20th century it did not significantly compete with shamanic, spiritual-based cures.

Only when Soviet power was established firmly in the north did this scenario begin rapidly to change. In the first decade of Bolshevik rule, it was mainly the Russian Orthodox Church that was suppressed, an event that actually granted the local shamans a respite from competition by a state sponsored ideology. This period proved brief, as shamanism too was came under savage attach during the 1930s, when the Ket were forcibly settled in Russian style villages. One of my oldest informants recalls seeing a pile of broken drums and other profaned shamanic attributes

left lying in the mud by the post office in Kellog village during the first wholesale anti-shaman campaign. Everyone saw this destruction as the loss of power by the shamans, since a broken drum symbolized death of the shaman who owned it. The establishment of modern medical personnel in the North likewise undermined reliance in shamanism, though the Ket continued regularly to make recourse to shamanic magic within the confines of their own family, especially when nomadizing away from the village during the fall and winter hunts. During most of the remainder of the 20th century, the small-scale family practice of shamanism went underground, if it survived at all. The age of "great shamans" known far and wide was over forever.

The last shaman in Kellog Village died in the 1970s, and his costume, modeled by his son, appears in figs. 3 and 4 above. According to my informants, there are no longer any true shamans among the Ket. The survivals of active Ket shamanism into the last quarter of the 20th century reported by Alekseenko (1997) appear to have by now largely disappeared. One hunter told me there would be no more shamans, because "Es [the sky deity] will never again send shamans to the people after how they were treated." Even basic knowledge of shamanic lore survives among no more than a select few of the older generation of Ket. This makes the ethnographic descriptions by Anuchin, Donner, Findeisen, and Alekseenko all the more invaluable as the sole surviving record of a tradition that is partly unique among shamanic practices and partly shared with other Siberian peoples in ways that provide a rare glimpse into the prehistory of the Ket.

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